

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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P R 271617Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 183
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 11127

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT IS EG XF
SUBJ: DMC LEADER ON PEACE AND HIS PARTY'S PROSPECTS

1. SUMMARY: IN CONVERSATION ON DECEMBER 26 WITH EMBOFF, DMC MK SHMUEL TOLEDANO DENIED BEGIN HAS CHANGED, VOICED CONCERN THAT THE WEST BANK PROBLEM WOULD UNDERMINE ANY FUTURE PEACE WITH EGYPT BUT WAS BASICALLY OPTIMISTIC OVER PEACE AND ITS EFFECTS FOR ISRAEL. HOWEVER, HE WAS PESSIMISTIC OVER HIS PARTY'S PROSPECTS AND, INDEED, ITS VIABILITY. END SUMMARY
2. TOLEDANO WAS PLEASED ABOUT SUCH CONCRETE RESULTS FROM THE BEGIN-SADAT SUMMIT AS THE SETTING UP OF THE TWO WORKING COMMITTEES AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL, AND NOT SURPRISED BY THE FAILURE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON THE WEST BANK. HOWEVER, HE WAS FEARFUL THAT IF LEFT UNRESOLVED THE PROBLEM OF THE PALESTINIANS WOULD EVENTUALLY UNDERMINE
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ANY BILATERAL AGREEMENT REACHED WITH EGYPT. CAIRO COULD NOT STAND ASIDE INDEFINITELY IF UNREST PREVAILED ON THE WEST BANK. THIS REALIZATION WOULD SPUR GOI DETERMINATION TO FIND A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO THE QUESTION.

3. TOLEDANO DISAGREED WITH THE WIDESPREAD PERCEPTION THAT BEGIN'S THINKING HAS UNDERGONE A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE SINCE

SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM. HE NOTED THAT BEGIN ALWAYS REJECTED YIELDING ANY PART OF THE WEST BANK AND THIS PRINCIPLE IS MAINTAINED IN HIS PLAN. THE IDF WILL REMAIN AND ULTIMATE POLITICAL CONTROL WOULD REST WITH ISRAEL. AN ALIGNMENT GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE SOUGHT A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE THROUGH DIVISION OF THE WEST BANK WITH JORDAN. BEGIN HAS ALL ALONG BEEN VAGUE CONCERNING THE SINAI AND THE GOLAN THEREBY ALLOWING HIMSELF THE OPTION OF FAR-REACHING WITHDRAWAL IN THOSE AREAS. TOLEDANO DID NOT BELIEVE BEGIN'S AUTONOMY FOR THE WEST BANK WOULD LEAD TO AN INDEPENDENT STATE THERE. HE MAINTAINED THAT IN THE TRIPARTITE REVIEW OF THE AREA'S STATUS AFTER FIVE YEARS, ISRAEL WOULD VETO SUCH A DEVELOPMENT. HE ALSO DISMISSED THE ARGUMENT THAT AUTONOMY WOULD FOSTER THE GROWTH OF A LOCAL NATIONALIST LEADERSHIP ESPOUSING INDEPENDENCE.

4. TOLEDANO SAID THESE OBJECTIONS AND MANY MORE WERE RAISED DURING BEGIN'S BRIEFING OF THE KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE LAST WEEK. QUESTIONING OF BEGIN WAS INTENSE AND PROLONGED. (THE MEETING LASTED SEVEN HOURS OVER TWO SESSIONS.) BEGIN ANSWERED SEVERAL ARGUMENTS BY SAYING NO ARAB LEADER COULD PUT HIS SIGNATURE TO A TREATY CEDING TERRITORY. HE REMINDED HIS INTERLOCUTERS THAT FOR 30 YEARS ISRAELIS ARGUED BORDERS AMONG THEMSELVES, SINCE THERE WAS NO ARAB WHO WOULD LISTEN. NOW THERE ARE TALKS WITH AT LEAST ONE ARAB COUNTRY AND ISRAEL
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CANNOT INSIST ON HAVING ITS WAY ON EVERY ISSUE. EGYPTIAN REQUIREMENTS MUST BE CONSIDERED. TOLEDANO SAT DIRECTLY OPPOSITE BEGIN DURING THE SESSIONS AND WATCHING HIM CONVINCED TOLEDANO OF HIS SINCERITY. IN THE END ALMOST ALL COMMITTEE MEMBERS INDICATED SUPPORT FOR BEGIN. TOLEDANO WAS PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED BY THE BACKING OF LABOR MKS WHO ULTIMATELY LINED UP BEHIND BEGIN, THOUGH SOME HAD QUESTIONED HIM CLOSELY.

5. TOLEDANO IS CONVINCED PEACE WILL BRING PROSPERITY TO ISRAEL. UNTIL THE SADAT INITIATIVE HE HAD BEEN PESSIMISTIC ABOUT ISRAEL'S FUTURE, FEARING RE-CURRENT WAR. NOW, IN EXPECTATION OF A SETTLEMENT HE FORESEES TRADE, ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND TOURISM WITH EGYPT AND INCREASED FOREIGN INVESTMENT COMING IN THE WAKE OF PEACE. ISRAELI TRAVEL AGENTS AND ENTREPRENEURS ARE ITCHING TO TAP THE EGYPTIAN MARKET.

6. HE WAS HOWEVER GLOOMY INDEED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HIS PARTY. THE DMC HAD COME ON THE SCENE TO FILL A VOID IN ISRAEL'S BODY POLITIC WHICH, ACCORDING TO TOLEDANO, IS PROVING TRANSITORY. THE POLITICAL CENTER IS DISAPPEARING, OR RATHER BEING CO-OPTED BY THE LIKUD.

MOREOVER, THE DMC IS RIDDEN WITH INTERNAL STRIFE AND DISHARMONY, ON WHICH TOLEDANO DECLINED TO ELABORATE. HE DID, HOWEVER, STRONGLY DEPRECATE YADIN'S LEADERSHIP WHICH HE CALLED ONE OF HIS PARTY'S MAJOR PROBLEMS. YADIN HAS NO PATIENCE FOR HIS PARTY COLLEAGUES, RUDELY CUTTING OFF THEIR ADVICE, COMPLAINTS, ENTREATIES, ETC. REVOLT SMOLDERS AMONG SUCH DMC LEADERS AS WIRSHUBSKI, YAGURI, NOFF AND TOLEDANO HIMSELF. THIS DISCONTENT IS INDEPENDENT OF POLICY DIFFERENCES.

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UM PERHAPS MORE OMINOUS FOR THE PARTY'S FUTURE IS ITS PREDICAMENT AS A JUNIOR COALITION PARTNER. ALTHOUGH TOLEDANO THOUGHT JOINING THE GOVERNMENT A WISE DECISION (IN OPPOSITION, THE DMC WOULD BE WORSE OFF), AT ELECTION TIME THE LIKUD WILL GARNER ALL THE CREDIT FOR PEACE. ON THE OTHER HAND, VOTERS OPPOSED TO THE LIKUD WILL NOT VOTE FOR ITS COALITION SIDE-KICK BUT FOR AN OPPOSITION PARTY. IN ANY EVENT, TOLEDANO IS NOT SURE HIS PARTY WILL SURVIVE UNTIL THE NEXT ELECTION.

8. HE DOUBTED THAT BEGIN WOULD CALL ELECTIONS BEFORE EXPIRATION OF THE KNESSET'S NORMAL TERM IN 1981. DISSOLVING THE HOUSE IS NOT AN EASY MATTER AND BEGIN WOULD WANT TO AVOID THE CHARGE OF NAKED OPPORTUNISM. GOLDA MEIR

AND SEVERAL OTHER LABOR PARTY LEADERS HAVE DEMANDED ELECTIONS BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION OF ANY AGREEMENT ON THE WEST BANK AND BEGIN HAS INDICATED HE WOULD COMPLY IF THE OPPOSITION SO INSISTS, BUT TOLEDANO WAS CONVINCED THAT COOLER
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HEADS AMONG THE ALIGNMENT LEADERSHIP WOULD PREVAIL. THERE MIGHT, HOWEVER, BE A REFERENDUM PRIOR TO THE SIGNING OF A PEACE TREATY. ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO PRECEDENT FOR IT, A REFERENDUM IS NOT INCOMPATIBLE WITH ISRAELI LAW.

9. TOLEDANO BELIEVES THE LIKUD WOULD WIN A SOLID MAJORITY IF AN ELECTION WERE IN FACT HELD FOLLOWING THE OUTBREAK OF PEACE. HE COULD FORESEE NO LIKELY CIRCUMSTANCE THAT WOULD PREVENT SUCH A RESULT EVEN IN AN ELECTION AS FAR OFF AS 1981. HE DID NOT SEE A MAJOR REALIGNMENT OF PARTIES BUT FELT THE TREND IN ISRAEL TO BE TOWARD TWO MAJOR PARTIES -- LIKUD AND ALIGNMENT.

10. COMMENT: AS ADVISER TO THE PRIME MINISTER FOR ARAB AFFAIRS IN THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, TOLEDANO HAD PUT HIS FUTURE ON THE LINE BY QUITTING AND RUNNING ON THE DMC TICKET. (AT THE TIME HIS RESIGNATION WAS CONSIDERED A SIGNIFICANT BLOW TO THE ALIGNMENT'S HOPES AMONG ARAB VOTERS.) YET, HE DOES NOT APPEAR UNDULY TROUBLED BY THE PROSPECT OF HIS PARTY'S DEMISE. PERHAPS HE EXPECTS AN EASY RETURN TO THE LABOR PARTY. WE FIND HIS VIEWS ABOUT BEGIN'S CONSISTENCY ON THE TERRITORIES NOVEL AMONG ISRAELI OBSERVERS AND UNCONVINCING. LIKUDNIKS AND ALIGNMENT LEADERS ALIKE REMARK OVER BEGIN'S TURN-ABOUT. EVEN TOLEDANO ADMITTED THAT HIS WIFE, FOR WHOM BEGIN WAS ANATHEMA SOME MONTHS AGO, NOW SAYS SHE WOULD VOTE FOR HIM. LEWIS

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